



FLORIDA

"We would definitely participate in the TTI process again."

HIRING FORENSIC PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT IN TREATMENT

Project Background, Vision, and Outcomes

Florida sought to enhance existing reentry services for people leaving jail with mental illness through the use of forensic peer specialists. To better inform mental health services delivery, Department of Children and Families (DCF) uses the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) (shown on the next page) to keep individuals with mental health needs out of the legal system and state hospitals and this provided a framework for the Transformation Transfer Initiative (TTI) award.

The vision for the project was to hire forensic peer specialists, which is an area that does not already utilize peer services yet it is the intercept with the highest number of people involved/in need of treatment. Forensic peer specialists would collaborate with jails to assess and coordinate treatment for individuals immediately after arrest and do "early engagement work to get people out of jail."

The outcome of the award was to hire three forensic peer specialists to work in area jails, however, the project faced significant challenges to achieving its goal.

Project Implementation: Challenges and Lessons Learned

The main barrier to project implementation was the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic which closed the jails and prevented interviews for forensic peer specialists. Because DCF staff could not get to their jail patients, they concentrated on diverting people from jail to state hospitals in order to provide services.

Another large barrier was related to mandatory background checks that peer specialists often cannot pass. Although waivers exist, most peer specialists do not know about it and/or do not have the time to contest the process. For this reason, recruitment of FSPs was difficult because it was hard to find people who wanted

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to do the work, who were part of the population or had significant experience with it, and who can pass a background check to work in jail setting. Other barriers to hiring peers included many not being workforce ready and the need to have a “thick skin” to avoid burn out. It was also mentioned that managing peer specialists can be time consuming and more information and infrastructure is needed surrounding the use of peers among state agencies. Lastly, a few “naysayers” feel that using peers “isn’t worth it” and are not receptive to peer support services.

Sustainability and Project Legacy

The sustainability of this project is unknown at this time. Changes in staff has caused a communication gap and inability to efficiently analyze the outcomes and process used to implement this project.

Although the initial stages of the project were very slow and Florida faced many implementation challenges, Florida would participate in the TTI process again. Leadership was happy that an award existed that could be used for individuals with lived experience.

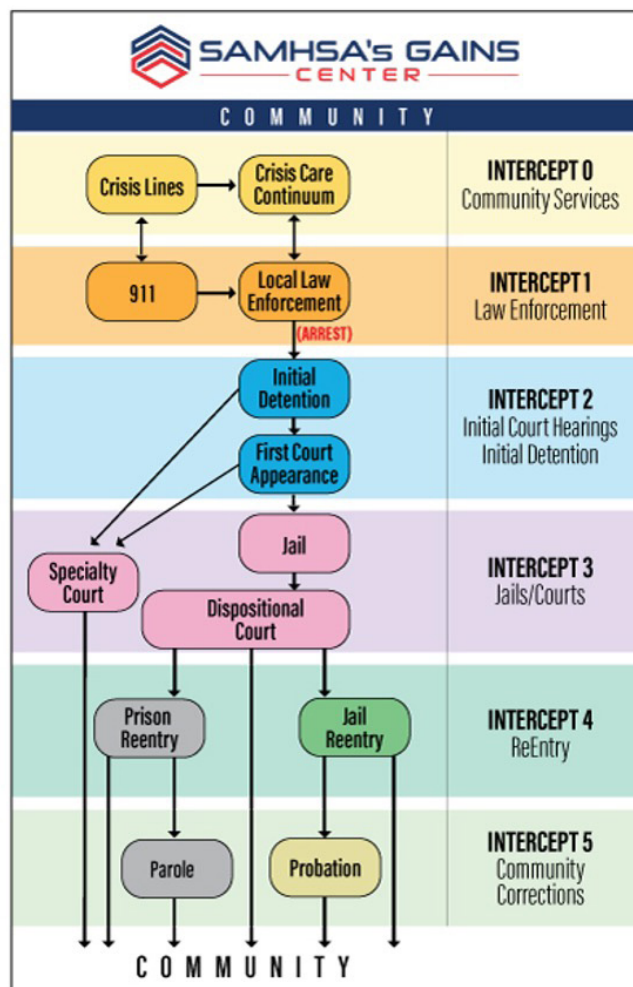
Health Equity

This project was centered around individuals with mental illness and peers with lived experience in the criminal justice system. Both of these groups represent traditionally marginalized groups who could benefit from improved health equity.

Peer Services Utilization

The purpose of this project was to hire three forensic peer specialists to help engage people in treatment and prevent psychiatric hospitalizations. Prior to the award, peer support services were incorporated into several treatment models and were “part of the team,” but significant gaps existed in the forensic spaces.

SEQUENTIAL INTERCEPT MODEL (SIM)



Trauma Informed Care

Prior to receiving TTI award funding, DCF was incorporating trauma informed care information from the GAINS Center into the agency. Training peers in trauma informed care was part of the original vision, but challenges to hiring peer specialists hampered this goal.

For further information about this project contact Asta Trinh at asta.trinh@myflfamilies.com.